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LEADERSHIP:

Some Thoughts on the Military Circa 2025

By DAVID E. PRICE

Having the right leader in the right place at the right time has always been critical to victory. Yet for an institution such as the Armed Forces it is not leaders who bring success but *leadership*. Is there a real difference between individual leaders and institutional leadership? History is replete with examples of the importance of a leader's personal character, courage, and skill to the outcome of an operation. But unlike battles, campaigns, or even protracted conflicts, military institutions are long-term organizations which have enduring political, cultural, and social values. Their key to success is not a single outstanding leader or even a succession of them. Institutional achievement is founded on a system of ongoing collective *leadership* that transcends individuals.

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Today, we face significant challenges—none more critical than developing 21st century leadership. What issues will confront future leaders? What qualities and skills will they need to

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meet the challenges? How should young officers be prepared for leadership roles? These are tough questions that leadership needs to consider today.

Challenges

Numerous trends will shape military leadership over the next thirty years. First, traditional hands-on leadership will remain essential. Second, the current trend toward joint operations will evolve into thoroughly integrated forces. Third, peace operations and other noncombat roles will continue to grow—becoming a major

share of our overall military mission. Fourth, new technology will go on driving rapid change. And finally, fiscal constraints will continue to affect military decisions, especially those related to force structure and modernization.

Traditional leadership. Personal leadership skills will remain essential for the officer of the 21st century. Leaders must think strategically, impart organizational goals, foster group cohesion, enforce discipline, and make pragmatic decisions in stressful situations. There is no substitute for hands-on guidance when training, motivating, and directing people. Nevertheless, leadership will be different in 2025.

Leading integrated forces. Joint operations point toward a future of integrated forces. For example, the Air Force provides air and space operations specialists for our Nation's joint military force. Most Air Force leaders come from that kind of operational background. They understand global reach—global power and the capability it pro-

vides to our National Command Authorities and theater commanders. However, by 2025 most Air Force leaders will not only be familiar with the roles and missions of their own service in joint operations; they will command integrated forces. This means that an effective Air Force leader must understand how to conduct carrier based flight operations as well as how to plan a major peacekeeping operation—not just its airlift or fighter support. It also requires that the Air Force be ready to accept commanders from other services in traditional Air Force leadership roles. Clearly, this trend will affect military commanders from all force components—land, sea, and air.

Ready for noncombat roles. The Armed Forces have been tasked to carry out a variety of nontraditional military missions since the Cold War. By 2025, operations other than war including peace operations will be a routine part of their job. However, it is unlikely that the United States will undertake these missions unilaterally. Thus small-scale multinational force

military leaders will be immersed in a “deep-purple suit” environment

deployments will be relatively common. Successful leaders will be able to relate to diverse cultural elements within their commands as well as deal directly with people in the region whose language and culture differ from our own. An open mind and linguistic skills will be vital for commanders on all levels.

Champions of systematic change. The technological revolution is likely to intensify. This will not only lead to new weapon systems, but information warfare which will change the nature of war. Today, effective leaders drive change to take advantage of emerging technology. By 2025, technology-driven change will put constant pressure on military organizations to reinvent themselves. Officers who follow a traditional organizational paradigm by responding to innovation will fail the leadership test. Successful leaders will be proactive engineers of change—facilitating rapid institutional innova-

tion without sacrificing order or organizational effectiveness.

Leaders as businessmen. Our force structure is a result of fiscally constrained decisions made by past and present civilian and military leadership. Conditions will be no different in 2025. What will change, however, is the focus of leaders. Today, they too often concentrate on getting “rubber on the ramp” at the expense of good business practices. In the future, they must be world class businessmen. Force planning will require consideration of all options including nonmilitary alternatives. Tradeoffs that must be made to optimize force structure will be at least as challenging as those of today. Senior leaders will need an understanding of the budget process and knowledge of cost and systems analysis. Those officers who have force planning and budget expertise will be prepared to serve as senior decision-makers while those without it will be relegated to lesser roles.

The leadership environment of the 21st century will be extremely challenging. Our military leaders will be immersed in a “deep-purple suit” environment in 2025. They will plan and execute nontraditional missions and often lead non-U.S. forces. They will implement rapid organizational change driven by technology. And they will make major long-term force structure decisions based on cost/benefit analyses. The cumulative impact will demand a new mix of leadership skills.

Leadership Concept

Cadets and midshipmen today will form the leadership of 2025. As previously noted, they will need joint experience, cross-cultural and linguistic skills, an understanding of information age warfare, and a business executive's eye for cost and quality. The question we face is how to build an officer corps for such an environment.

Perry M. Smith suggested in his book *Taking Charge* that those who mentor and ultimately select individuals for leadership roles should “pick individuals who have the capacity to grow and to become gifted generalists.” This advice is more sound today

than ever. Individual members of our future military leadership team will need an unprecedented wealth of generalist skills and a broad base of widely applicable experience.

What if the services continue to train leaders who possess traditional skills and expertise? On the surface this option appears satisfactory. We have an abundance of effective tactical leaders, superb staff officers able to manage complex support systems, and experienced senior leaders with strategic vision responsible for directing large organizations. That sounds like adequate leadership, so why not stick to the status quo?

That approach will not suffice tomorrow. Effective military leadership must be responsive to both the socioeconomic and political environment in which it finds itself. Any force that settles for good traditional leadership will be hard pressed to match an enemy who has adopted the same lessons of leadership and moved on—challenging, refocusing, and updating its leadership concept.

The basic issue is that traditional officer development models tend to be narrowly focused. Decisionmaking, communication skills, standards and discipline, and organizational relationships tend to get significant attention. Jointness also receives emphasis today. However, even there the focus is too often on joint processes and organizations rather than on overall force integration and cross-service team building. The human relations training that most officers receive is inadequate to develop a broad appreciation of cultural diversity; and language training is left to those destined for unique careers, such as defense attachés. Finally, information warfare and the budget process are simply regarded as utilitarian specialties with no direct relevance outside a functional context.

In 2025, we will probably need about the same mixture of tactical leaders, staff officers, and senior decisionmakers we have today. But without changing the way they are prepared, there will be an increasing number of tactical level commanders

who are unable to take full advantage of new warfighting technologies or cope with increasingly complex personnel problems, staff officers who are controlled by the bureaucracy rather than controlling it, and senior level decisionmakers who are captives of institutional decisionmaking processes. We are already facing these problems to some extent, and the trend is clearly increasing.

The key to effective long-term leadership in this new environment is a professional development process

the Joint Chiefs should adopt a comprehensive development concept to guide efforts to educate officers

that rewards officers who acquire the right generalist skills and experience. Those who have been assigned outside their services are better equipped to plan, coordinate, and direct integrated forces. A second language and ability to relate to diverse cultures are also assets. Officers with these skills can directly lead multinational units and build personal relationships that would otherwise depend on junior for-

eign area specialists. The same is true for first-hand experience in information warfare and the budget process. Leaders with a background in these matters will have the knowledge to remain proactive decisionmakers. The rest will find institutional bureaucracies identifying critical issues, determining alternatives, and framing decisions for them.

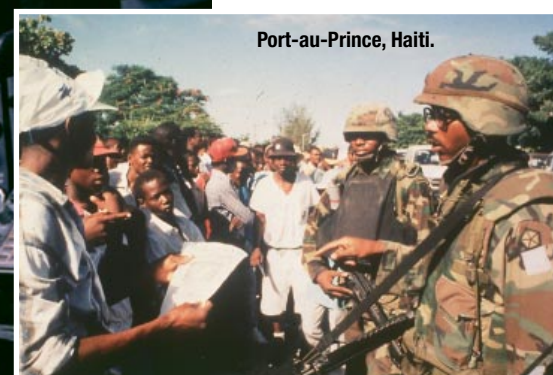
Recommendations

First, the Chairman and the Joint Chiefs should set specific long-term goals for developing future generations of leadership. Second, the Chairman should direct the senior and intermediate colleges to undertake a joint study of long-term leadership requirements. Third, the Joint Chiefs should adopt a comprehensive development concept to guide efforts to educate and train officers. Fourth, appropriate service commands should publish leadership development guides focused on 21st century requirements—not career specific, but a roadmap for becoming a “gifted generalist.” Fifth, the Joint Staff should work with the services and other DOD components to increase the number of cross-service,

career-broadening assignments at all levels. This should be a reciprocal exchange of operational as well as staff positions. Since it will not be easy to achieve, the Chairman should champion this initiative. Sixth, leadership development should be on the agenda of all senior level planning sessions held throughout the Armed Forces. Without the active and ongoing direction of today's top leadership the development of tomorrow's leaders will simply default to the status quo.

The world is rapidly changing. If the U.S. military is to remain the world's most capable and respected fighting force in the 21st century and beyond, future leadership teams will require each member to bring an unprecedented range of both skills and experience to the overall mission. The leadership team of 2025 is being created now. It will mature over the next three decades. What we need is a clear development concept to guide its progress toward 2025.

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